

# Activists plan flyover alternate

By Nicole Fay Barr

**GUILDERLAND** — While a Thruway flyover is still being considered for McKownville, its residents are doing more than voicing opposition. Members of the McKownville Improvement Association have spent weeks studying the Thruway's proposals and engineering plans and decided to create a new proposal of their own.

The detailed plan combines parts of two of the Thruway Authority's concepts and eliminates the flyover. The association drafted a formal report of its ideas to submit to the authority.

"We juggled to come up with a new concept and we think it's pretty good," Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Improvement Association, told *The Enterprise* this week.

Reeb was the first to speak out against the flyover concept. He told *The Enterprise* about it last October, before the idea was formally announced. The flyover, proposed to run from the Schoolhouse Road bridge in McKownville, near the Western Avenue ramps, would bring more noise and pollution to residents' already disturbed neighborhood, Reeb has said.

"The residents of McKownville, all 925 of us, all dogs, cats, everybody is opposed to this flyover," he said at a Thruway public-input meeting earlier this year.

Thruway Authority spokeswoman Betsy Graham told *The Enterprise* Wednesday that she hasn't yet seen the association's new proposal. But, she said, it will be read and considered.

"Our study team does take all comments and concerns into consideration," she said.

## Studied concepts

The Thruway Authority began developing ways to improve the highway last summer. Traffic increases each year, Thruway officials have said, and parts of the Thruway are already handling their maximum capacity of cars at certain times in the day.

Also, officials said, the study is needed because the Thruway will turn 50 years old this year. The highway must be examined in order to meet future needs, they said.

"unacceptable levels" within the next two years, officials said.

One proposal is to simply move the Thruway ramps west of Rapp Road. The other three proposals involve creating separate E-ZPass ramps.

E-ZPass is a system where drivers attach an electronic device to their windshields. The device is scanned as the vehicle goes through entrance and exit tollbooths on the Thruway. The

The McKownville Improvement Association favors the barrier concept. In its letter to the Thruway Authority, the association writes that barriers are "breakthrough thinking because they eliminate the requirement for Thruway toll collection at Exit 24."

But, the letter goes on, the current proposals for a barrier at Exit 24 fail to meet the objective of optimal efficiency.

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driver only has to slow down to pass through the tollbooth and is billed monthly for the toll charges.

One of these three concepts is called the "flyover concept." However, all three involve some type of extra flyover ramp in McKownville.

At a public-input meeting in February, information was displayed for concepts to improve Exits 23, 24, and 25, and the mainline barrier and tandem lots.

But, more people asked and raised concerns about Exit 24 and the flyover than any other.

Graham said Wednesday that public input is important. "We take all comments seriously," she said. "The more feedback we get from the public, the better it will be."

Currently, the Thruway Authority is preparing a draft of its final report, Graham said; it is expected to be complete by the end of October. The four Exit 24 concepts are still being considered, she said, adding that she can't rank which is favored more.

## New idea

Another alternative being examined for the Thruway is a barrier system. Drivers would pay at barriers, constructed on the Thruway's main line, and not have to stop and pay tolls at exits between. This would make traffic flow faster and more easily, officials have said.

"And worse than being sub-optimal," the letter says, "the interchange 24 designs that include the construction of a Western Avenue flyover represent an invasion into an area near residential communities, well beyond the areas that have already been sacrificed to support the Thruway."

Using elements from the Thruway Authority's current proposals, the McKownville Improvement Association created a new concept for Exit 24, using a "two-barrier plan."

The changes include eliminating the flyover, rerouting traffic flows, and relocating the proposed Exit 24 tandem lot.

The first advantage of this new plan, according to the McKownville Improvement Association, is that it "does not impact negatively on areas outside of the current interchange area."

It also does not eliminate any flows currently available. The proposed Exit 24 design with a Western Avenue flyover provides no way for northbound Thruway traffic to get to Western Avenue, it says.

The association's plan also would save money over the current proposal; would eliminate the need to take land from the Albany Pine Bush preserve; and would reduce any associated impacts of residents for Rapp Road, according to the association.

For Exit 24 in McKownville, which links traffic from the Thruway to the Northway, to Interstate 90, or to Western Avenue in Guilderland, there are four proposals; these were narrowed from 15 ideas. All four proposals would expand the toll plaza and move the Thruway ramps further west.

This exit is the highest priority for the Thruway because it receives the most traffic congestion at peak hours. While other parts of the Thruway will need reconstruction within the next decade, traffic around Exit 24 will reach